

SENATOR CULLAN: They refuse to come until they receive some urging from their own county officials association and then only a small contingent came and we did not have the opportunity for a very meaningful dialogue on this issue. I think it's time to move this bill to make a significant step in improving mental health services in northeast Nebraska.

PRESIDENT: Eighteen minutes left on the debate and after I introduce Senator Wesely, Senators Rod Johnson, Hefner, and Chronister, have asked for time. Senator Wesely.

SENATOR WESELY: Thank you Mr. President, members of the Legislature. I have opposed LB 583 to this point and in Committee I did help get it out, tried to help Senator Peterson with the problem in his district but at that point I said I could no longer support it. Now I know the amendment to limit it strictly to Norfolk and I guess I'm inclined at this point to be more helpful to the bill than I was in the past. But nevertheless, I think the basic philosophical reason behind community based mental health centers cannot be lost in the discussion on LB 583. We have made a major change in mental health services in the State of Nebraska and over the years we've moved individuals that have mental illness from our regional centers into the community and these community based programs and it has been a trend that I think has been positive by and large. We will never be in a situation where we will not need our regional centers. We do need them and they do serve our State and they should continue to be well staffed and well supported. But nevertheless, our community based mental health programs have been a positive change and have been a positive trend and I think that we have been well served by that change. I think that what we're talking about here is not something I would like to see in Lancaster County. I think those of, who represent the Hastings area of the State would not like to see the change at Hastings. We think that mental health centers should be in the community, should be accessible to the general public and should not be part of the regional center. They are distinct and different services. The mental health center is there to serve the outpatient, the person that doesn't have as serious a problem, the person who just needs some outpatient care and is able to function well in society. The mental health problems of the regional center patients, however, is a far different one. It's a far more serious mental illness, one that requires constant attention, is not an individual you would want in the community. And my feeling is, of course, that that is a very distinct difference between the mental health center and the regional centers that we do have. So I think we cannot lose that distinction and by